

Central Intelligence Agency



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DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

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The Philippines: Impact of The Aquino Investigation FindingsSummary

Increasing evidence suggests that the board of inquiry into the Aquino assassination is moving inexorably to implicate the military in the murder and charge the government with an orchestrated coverup--a development that could have far reaching political consequences for President Marcos. The Board's finding will come as little surprise to most Filipinos, who have suspected government complicity from the beginning. Nonetheless, a public and official indictment would aggravate existing rifts in the Armed Forces, and could lead to renewed antigovernment demonstrations and impede Marcos's efforts to ensure a convincing victory in the National Assembly elections in May. The imminent unraveling of the government's efforts to limit the damage from the Aquino assassination also serves as another sign of rough seas ahead over the longer term for Marcos and political stability.

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The Board's Findings

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[redacted] the Agra Board could wind up its investigation as early as March by implicating senior [redacted] military officers in the assassination of Benigno Aquino. [redacted]

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This memorandum was prepared by [redacted] Islands Branch, Southeast Asia Division, Office of East Asian Analysis of the Directorate of Intelligence. Information used in the preparation of this paper was available as of 24 February 1984. Comments are welcome and may be directed to the Chief of Southeast Asia Division, [redacted]

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[redacted]

Nonetheless, the Board has made remarkable progress, and we believe that they have probably gone as far as they can with the investigation.* [redacted]

[redacted]

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Impact on the Military

The public release of the Board's findings may have its greatest impact on the Philippine military. The Aquino assassination has already damaged the military's public image, lowered morale, and resulted in a sharper division between factions associated with Armed Forces Vice Chief of Staff Fidel Ramos--known for his professional competence--and General Ver--whose tenure as Chief of Staff has been associated with an unprecedented level of corruption and the politicization of the promotion system. We believe that even an indirect implication of the military by the Board--almost certain in the weeks ahead--would aggravate existing rifts because many officers would blame the military's loss of credibility on the government's protection of a few corrupt officers involved in the assassination. [redacted]

[redacted]

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*If a recent request by the Board to interview witnesses in the United States and to obtain various technical forms of assistance from us is approved, the release of the findings might be delayed for several weeks but they will not be substantially altered in our view. [redacted]

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It is impossible to gauge the precise impact of a public "indictment" of the military. The existence of disaffected, professional-oriented officers raises the specter of a coup

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On balance, however, we continue to believe that such a coup targeted against the top leadership of the armed forces and the Marcos regime is not likely in the short term.

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If large-scale anti-government demonstrations occur in Manila as a result of the Board's findings, a much more likely outcome would be the reimposition of martial law. We believe this has a better than even chance of occurring if demonstrations exceed the scale of those last September.

If unrest were to escalate, military pressures to restore martial law could be impossible for Marcos to contain. We believe he might actually welcome an excuse to reimpose martial law if he concludes, as a result of renewed public protests, that the KBL cannot win an impressive majority in the National Assembly elections in May.

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Election Fallout

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We do not know the exact nature of the relationship between Marcos and the Agrava Board, but the Board has demonstrated independence by vigorously questioning witnesses and insisting that the military halt its own investigation of the assassination. It is impossible to say for certain whether Marcos will allow the Board to release official findings, but word of the conclusions are certain to leak out.

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Public reaction to the Board's findings will depend on whether they are released--officially or otherwise--in time to embarrass the government and the ruling KBL party prior to the

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National Assembly elections. Under these circumstances, the assassination would be revived as a political issue at a time when Marcos and his ruling party face a critical test of popular support and the electorate prepares to vote. Public indignation at the official tolerance of a coverup, moreover, could combine with unhappiness over austerity measures implemented since late last year at the insistence of the IMF. This increases the likelihood that the Board's findings would become a catalyst for large and perhaps violent antigovernment demonstrations. [redacted]

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If the findings are released next month, well in advance of the elections, Marcos at a minimum will face renewed pressures from his political opponents, the business community, and the Church to investigate the crime further, name the people responsible, and bring them to justice. Opposition groups would probably stage demonstrations demanding Marcos's resignation if he continues to permit officials in his government to "protect" those responsible. Opposition efforts to force the removal of General Ver, which began shortly after the Aquino assassination, would be taken up with renewed vigor if the public becomes convinced that he ordered the coverup to protect himself or his associates. [redacted]

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Marcos's opponents also might make their participation in the National Assembly elections contingent on additional progress in the investigation--an outcome we cannot discount entirely. Marcos already faces at least a partial boycott of the elections, and further intransigence on investigating the assassination might push all moderate opposition groups to boycott. A total boycott would further erode business and international financial confidence in the regime, and revive questions about the ability of the government to withstand a succession crisis. Marcos would have little room to maneuver under these circumstances to ensure broad participation in the elections, particularly if pursuing the investigation would only further tarnish his regime. [redacted]

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Can Marcos Defuse the Assassination as a Political Issue?

No matter what course the investigation takes in the coming weeks, the Aquino assassination has irreversibly damaged Marcos's credibility. His regime will almost certainly continue to suffer from the public's perception that high level civilians and military officers are culpable, even if, for example, he drags out the issue by promising to probe further into the Board's findings. In our judgment, Marcos will probably never be willing or able to make those individuals responsible publicly accountable for their actions. For that reason, notwithstanding the Board's actions during the next several weeks, we believe that the assassination will continue to haunt Marcos as critical financial negotiations continue and demands for political reform escalate. [redacted]

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